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Bar coding picks up steam with new vendor ID service.

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Bar coding picks up steam with new vendor ID service
INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. -- Hvacr wholesalers and manufacturers are much closer to bar coding today than they were a year ago, thanks to a new "data center" which will ease the transition. The center is part of the Industry Bar Code Alliance (IBCA).

The center, which was formed May 25, will harmonize vendor identification and product description. More importantly, the center can match the manufacturer's ID number with the wholesaler's own inventory file system.

To date, hundreds of manufacturers have registered with the center, said John Levis, whose Order-It! Inc. is the facilities manager for the center.

Levis outlined the system's operation at the annual meeting of the Northamerican Heating & Airconditioning Wholesalers Association (NHAW).

Many registration requests

"We have had many manufacturers call us to request a registration packet. We are up and running, and are now loading both commodity and branded items in our data center," he said.

When registered, the manufacturer's standard bar code number is stored in a computerized directory at the center. The center also provides help in getting vendors their unique manufacturer ID's, then in recording additional manufacturer-designated product numbers and descriptions, which are permanently associated with each item manufactured.

The IBCA standard permits either a five-character numeric or a 15-character alphanumeric product item number.

With manufacturer registration, wholesalers can match their own inventory items against the directory master file so the vendor's bar code numbers can be added to their file. The wholesaler avoids the work of manually obtaining the bar code number from each manufacturer and manually keying it into their file.

The center can match up to 95% of the wholesaler's inventory, Levis said.

"Instead of a wholesaler having to ask 500 manufacturers what they call each item they sell, he can send me an inventory sheet with his part numbers and descriptions. I can match them with the manufacturers who are registered, and he gets a tape back from me for his computer.

Commodity manufacturers have been quick to sign up, Levis continued. "A majority of commodity manufacturers have put a bar code on their packages in addition to their normal part number."

Wholesalers gearing up

At that meeting, several large wholesalers said they are gearing up to tap the bar coding technology. Included were Dale Cobble, of G.W. Berkheimer, Gary, Ind., and Doug Young, of Behler-Young, Grand Rapids, Mich.

"We are committed to it, we totally support it," Cobble told a press conference. "It's going to work."

Cobble said bar coding's greatest use will be in receiving and transfer areas, not at the point of sale. "Very few wholesalers are using

it at the point of sale," he said.

As an indication of wholesaler interest, Levis said the Noland Company, a large plumbing wholesaler, recently convened a meeting of 41 of its largest vendors. The vendors were told: start bar coding or look for another wholesaler outlet.

"Noland said he expected his large partners to send him goods via the standards, that no one enjoyed affixing their own bar coding on products coming in the door when the industry has its own standard. He also said it would be tougher for manufacturers to do business with his company if their goods came in without bar codes."

PHOTO : WHOLESALER DALE COBBLE, G.W. Berkheimer, is gearing up to accept bar coding as an

PHOTO : inventory control measure.

PHOTO : JOHN LEVIS explained the matching service provided by the data center.

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